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ABSTRACT

This Kids Count report is the tenth to examine annually statewide trends in the well-being of Washington's children and focuses on child poverty and the needs of the working poor. The statistical portrait is based on indicators of child well-being in five areas: (1) family and community, including teen birth rate, teen pregnancy rate, births to unmarried mothers, and children living in out-of-home care; (2) economic well-being, including average real wages, per capita income, and child care cost as a percent of take-home wages; (3) education, including reading and mathematics achievement and the extent of the racial gap; (4) health, including child mortality from medical conditions, suicide mortality, percentage of 2-year-olds fully immunized, and low birthweight rate; and (5) safety and security, including juvenile violent crime arrest rate, firearms deaths, child abuse referrals, and motor vehicle accident mortality. Following a summary of recent statewide trends in children's well-being, Part 2 of the report discusses how policy changes can mitigate the effects of poverty on children and break the cycle of poverty. Part 3 presents findings for key indicators in each of the 5 areas and discusses special concerns, including population diversity, needs of low-income working families, the cycle of poverty and education, youth obesity, and juvenile justice. The findings reveal that child poverty is more common for children outside the metropolitan Puget Sound region, under the age of five, and in single parent families. Child mortality from medical

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conditions and teen suicide mortality decreased from 1999 to 2000. During the 1990s, the juvenile arrest rate dropped by 20 percent. The report concludes with information on data sources. (KB)

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THE STATE OF WASHINGTON'S CHILDREN

SUMMER 2002

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THE STATE OF WASHINGTON'S CHILDREN

Summer 2002

This is the tenth annual report on The State of Washington's Children. It was produced by the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine in collaboration with the Human Services Policy Center in the Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington. This report is part of the Washington Kids Count Project, which receives major funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

University of Washington
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THE STATE OF WASHINGTON'S CHILDREN

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THE STATE OF WASHINGTON'S CHILDREN

Contents

Recent Trends 4-5

Summary 6

Working but Struggling: Child Poverty in Washington State 7-10

Family & Community
- Key Indicators 11
- The Changing Face of the State 12-14

Economic Well-Being
- Key Indicators 15
- Meeting the Needs of Low-Income Working Families 16-18

Education
- Key Indicators 19
- The Cycle of Poverty and Education 20-22

Health
- Key Indicators 23
- Obesity and Youth 24-26

Safety & Security
- Key Indicators 27
- Juvenile Justice in Washington State 28-30

Sources & Endnotes 31-32

Washington Kids Count ..... inside back cover

summer 2002

WHAT'S BETTER

WHAT'S NOT BETTER

FAMILY & COMMUNITY INDICATORS

	1999	2000
Teen Birth Rate *(per 1,000 15- to 17-Year Olds)*	22.4	20.4
Teen Pregnancy Rate *(per 1,000 15- to 17-Year Olds)*	39.2	36.3
Divorces Involving Children	14,714	13,999

	1999	2000
Births to Unmarried Mothers *(Percent of All Births)*	27.9%	28.2%
Children Living in Out-of-Home Care *(Total Number, Unduplicated)*	16,361	19,103

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING INDICATORS

None of the economic indicators showed improvement.

	1999	2000
Average Real Wages *(in 2000 Dollars)*	$36,958	$37,070
Per Capita Income *(in 2001 Dollars)*	2000	2001*
	$32,119	$31,582
Annual Child Care Cost *(in 2000 Dollars)*	1998	2000
	$5,508	$5,808
Child Care Cost as a Percent of Take-Home Wages *(Single Parent Earner)*	1998	2000
	19.1%	19.1%

• preliminary estimate

EDUCATION INDICATORS

	2000	2001
Percent Meeting Basic Standards *10th Grade Math*	41%	46%
Select Minorities vs. White Children – Extent of Gap	2000	2001
7th Grade Math	-10.0%	-9.4%
7th Grade Reading	-3.8%	-3.0%

	2000	2001
Percent Meeting Basic Standards		
4th Grade Math	48%	50%
4th Grade Reading	74%	75%
7th Grade Math	33%	32%
7th Grade Reading	48%	47%
10th Grade Reading	71%	73%
Select Minorities vs. White Children – Extent of Gap	2000	2001
4th Grade Math	-6.0%	-5.9%
4th Grade Reading	-2.9%	-2.9%
10th Grade Math	-6.9%	-8.0%
10th Grade Reading	-3.9%	-4.3%

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WHAT'S BETTER

HEALTH INDICATORS

	1999	2000
Mortality from Medical Conditions		
(Deaths per 100,000 1- to 9-Year Olds)	13.2	11.2
(Deaths per 100,000 10- to 19-Year Olds)	10.7	9.9
Suicide Mortality		
(Deaths per 100,000 10- to 19-Year Olds)	7.6	5.6
Percent of 2-Year Olds Fully Immunized	65.5%	71.2%

SAFETY & SECURITY INDICATORS

	1998	2000
Juvenile Arrest Rate for Violent Crime		
(per 1,000 10- to 17-Year Olds)	3.3	2.8
	1998	**1999**
Juveniles Held in Detention		
(per 1,000 10- to 17-Year Olds)	50.8	47.4
	1999	**2000**
Mortality Due to Firearms		
(Deaths per 100,000 15- to 19-Year Olds)	13.6	10.7
	1999	**2000**
Percent of Mortality Due to Firearms		
(Percent of Deaths of 15- to 19-Year Olds)	20.8%	17.7%
	1999	**2000**
Child Abuse Accepted Referrals		
(per 1,000 Children < 17 Years Old)	28	26

WHAT'S NOT BETTER

HEALTH INDICATORS

	1999	2000
Low Birthweight Rate		
(Percent of All Births)	5.8%	5.6%

SAFETY & SECURITY INDICATORS

	1999	2000
Mortality from Unintentional Injuries		
(Deaths per 100,000 0- to 14-Year Olds)	8.0	9.2
(Deaths per 100,000 15- to 19-Year Olds)	30.5	33.6
	1999	**2000**
Homicide Mortality		
(Deaths per 100,000 15- to 19-Year Olds)	6.3	6.3
	1999	**2000**
Mortality due to Motor Vehicle Accidents		
(Deaths per 100,000 1- to 19-Year Olds)	7.4	8.7

SUMMARY

This is our tenth annual report on The State of Washington's Children. As in previous years, we compiled information from a variety of sources to develop a comprehensive, up-to-date, and pertinent picture of the health and well-being of children in our state. Highlights include:

- During the 1990s the child population in Washington increased by 20%, with a 106% increase in the number of Hispanic children. Hispanics are now the largest minority population in the state.
- Almost 200,000 Washington residents immigrated to the US in the 1990s. Half of Asians/Pacific Islanders and one-third of Hispanics in Washington are recent immigrants.
- Over half of children living with single mothers in 2000 were living in poverty.
- In 2000, almost 26,000 births (31.3% of all births) in Washington were paid for by Medicaid.
- Between July 2000 and July 2001, 1.1 million individuals (almost 350,000 families) visited food banks.
- More 10th grade students met basic math standards on the WASL in 2001 than in 2000.
- Less than 1 out of every 7 Hispanic and Native American adults living with children have a Bachelor's degree or higher, in contrast to more than 1 out of every 3 whites and Asians/Pacific Islanders.
- Mortality from medical conditions for all children and suicide mortality for 10- to 19-year olds decreased from 1999 to 2000.
- In Seattle, 9% of high school boys and 6% of girls were significantly overweight in 1999. An additional 15% of boys and 11% of girls were "at risk" for future obesity.
- Approximately half of normal-weight high school girls in Seattle were trying to lose weight.
- During the 1990s, the juvenile arrest rate in Washington dropped by 20%. Between 1996 and 2000, the arrest rate among African American youth decreased by over 30%.
- The proportion of youth appearing in juvenile court who were referred to diversion programs dropped from 48% to 38% during the 1990s.

WORKING BUT STRUGGLING: CHILD POVERTY IN WASHINGTON STATE

"The economy has done about as much as it's going to do for child poverty and most low-income parents are working as hard as they can. The job now is to make work pay so parents can move their children out of poverty."

Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund

The afterglow of the booming 1990s has nurtured a popular but erroneous perception – that getting parents off the dole and into jobs has moved vast numbers of children out of poverty and into the middle class. Yes, welfare caseloads are down since the 1996 reforms. And yes, most low-income parents are working, but one-third of our children live in families with inadequate income that lack middle-class advantages.

Many working parents do not make enough to feed and support their families, to pay for child care and healthcare, to cover transportation costs, and to train for higher-paying jobs. The source of most recent statistics – the 2000 U.S. Census – does not capture the devastating effects of the economic downturn that started in late 2000 and does not yet show reliable signs of recovery. In 2001 and 2002, we have seen increased demand for a variety of support services including food stamps, food banks, Medicaid, and Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF).

Washington State has been especially hard hit. Between April 2001 and April 2002, non-farm employment in Washington fell by almost 65,000 jobs – losses that cut across all kinds of work and far exceeded the 30,000 Boeing layoffs that dominated headlines. The state's unemployment rate is well above the national average and second only to unemployment in our neighbor to the south, Oregon. Over the past year, Washington has experienced the largest percentage decrease in employment in the United States. At the same time, real estate continues to boom, making housing increasingly unaffordable for low-income working families. Add the effects of initiatives that cut taxes (and funds for programs and services), and revenue losses associated with the overall economic decline, and we have the equivalent of a poverty sinkhole – a massive softening of the ground beneath our feet that has not yet worked its way into our collective consciousness.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 17 percent of children in Washington State lived below the federal poverty level (FPL) in the year 2000. (In 2002 the FPL for a family of four was an annual income at or below $18,100.) Anyone familiar with the real cost of living knows that rising above the poverty level is not the same as getting out of poverty. Research indicates that to cover basic expenses a family needs an annual income at least two times the federal poverty level.

About a quarter-million Washington children are living below the official poverty level, and another quarter-million are above the poverty level but have inadequate income. That adds up to about half-million children – approximately 1 out of every 3 – whose families are struggling to make ends meet.

In this year's *State of Washington's Children*, we address the challenges facing low-income working families. We hope to shed light on crucial questions, including: Who are the children in poverty? How does poverty impact children in our state? What can be done to help these families get a realistic shot at the stability, self-sufficiency, and respect that characterize the American Dream?

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SPEND NOW OR PAY LATER

WHY SHOULD WASHINGTON SPEND ITS LIMITED RESOURCES ON PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN? Because investing resources now in Washington's children – especially children in low-income families – is the right thing to do and it pays off.

To compete in a global economy, Washington must have a healthy, skilled, and socially responsible population of workers:

- Health: Providing general and mental health services reduces future health expenses and the costs associated with lost workdays.
- Skills: Educational systems that help all children achieve increase their potential to meet the demands of today's job market.
- Social Responsibility: Health, education, and prevention programs help reduce juvenile crime, substance use, and violence and delinquency.

Investing *now* reaps future benefits. For example:

- Every dollar spent on pregnant women in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program produces two to four dollars in Medicaid savings by reducing premature and low-birthweight births.
- Early childhood education programs can produce benefits up to four times the program cost when estimates include the costs of grade retention, special education, criminal activity, and reduced adult incomes.

The return on investment for many programs is higher for low-income or other at-risk populations. Therefore, on purely economic grounds, focusing on children in low-income families is especially important when resources are scarce.

WHO ARE THE CHILDREN IN POVERTY?

Poverty is not evenly distributed in Washington. Although no child is immune from poverty, the latest demographics suggest that some groups of children are especially susceptible:

- In 2000, 58 percent of all children under the age of 5 who were being raised by a single mother were living in poverty. Contrary to popular belief, the majority of these single mothers are employed.
- Families that immigrated to the United States in the past five years have the hardest time financially. In 1999, 63 percent of recent immigrants living with children in Washington had family incomes below the federal poverty level.
- In 1999, poverty rates of African American (30 percent), Native American (37 percent), and Hispanic (35 percent) children in Washington were about three times that of white children (12 percent).
- Rates of child poverty are substantially higher in our state's rural counties.

HOW DOES POVERTY IMPACT CHILDREN?

Poverty adversely influences almost every aspect of a child's life. These effects are worse when poverty starts early, and when it persists for long periods. The impacts start before birth. Low-income mothers are less likely to obtain timely prenatal care and more likely to have low-birthweight babies. In turn, low birthweight is associated with lower school performance and greater emotional problems through childhood.

The impacts continue in preschool, with very low-income children receiving lower quality non-parental child care and showing substantially lower verbal and IQ scores. Marital conflict and parental depression are common in parents who are trying to provide for their families with few resources. This parental stress can lead to emotional and behavioral problems in the children – and to abuse.

Once in school, children from very low-income families score lower on academic tests, fall below standards for their grade levels, and exhibit more behavior and attention problems. In 2001, fewer than 25 percent of 10th graders in Washington's poorest racial/ethnic groups (Hispanic, Native American, and African American) met basic math standards on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). By 2008, students will not graduate from high school if they fail to meet basic state standards.

Adolescents in very low-income families are more likely than adolescents in more affluent households to have sexual intercourse, get pregnant, use drugs and alcohol, act violently, and drop out of school – all behaviors that can profoundly limit their future opportunities.

The connections between poverty and education persist through adulthood, perpetuating the cycle of poverty with the deflated incomes earned by those whose education has not prepared them for today's marketplace. While work is touted as the antidote to welfare, education is the elixir of advancement – the universally acknowledged ingredient that makes it possible to climb a career ladder and rise above subsistence earnings.

LOW-INCOME LIVING: A SNAPSHOT

JOB LIMITATIONS	TRANSPORTATION LIMITATIONS	HOUSING LIMITATIONS	CHILD CARE LIMITATIONS
• Limited or no leave for family emergencies or sick child • No schedule flexibility to take child to after-school activities • Difficulty volunteering or participating in the classroom	• Difficulty getting to services and appointments, particularly in rural areas • Necessity of living near bus route to prevent job loss when car needs unaffordable repair	• Frequent moves due to cost • Health hazards (rodents, roaches, poor maintenance) • Violence and drugs in neighborhood prevent children from playing outside	• Decisions based primarily on cost and location • Locations limited to those that take vouchers • Unaffordable after-school activities leave children and adolescents unsupervised

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CLOSING THE GAP

The problem is not getting parents off welfare and into jobs. *Seventy-three percent of families living in poverty in Washington are headed by working adults*, 61 percent by single adults, and only 17 percent by single, non-working parents.

Climbing out of the sinkhole of poverty is a process, and joining the workforce is just the first step. Parents are working, but many are not making enough to provide for their families. Several kinds of support will be necessary to help parents take the next steps in the process. These supports are meant to be transitional. We must provide two kinds of support – efforts that mitigate the immediate impact of poverty on children's lives and efforts that break the cycle of poverty and offer promise to future generations.

Implementing the following kinds of policies can mitigate the impacts of poverty on children:

- Creative ways to provide, pay for, and improve the quality of early care and education available to the children of working parents: Affordable, dependable, high-quality care is a top priority for working parents, but current subsidies reach only a fraction of those needing assistance.

- Emotional and mental health support for parents and their children: The Tulalip Tribes are participating in Starting Early Starting Smart, a collaborative intervention and research program that provides integrated behavioral health services to young children and their families.

- Rewards for working: A recent study found that the federal earned income tax credit (EITC) lifts 2.5 million children out of poverty. Refundable state earned income credits would further benefit low-income children. In Washington State, we need to explore new tax approaches to reward work by low- and moderate-income parents.

- Family-friendly benefits for workers, which include health and dental insurance, family leave, and scheduling flexibility: While many employers currently offer these benefits, workers at the lowest income levels are often excluded.

- Better healthcare policies for children: Although the return on investment of preventive healthcare and nutrition is well-documented, Washington recently eliminated Medicaid eligibility for more than 25,000 immigrant children and trimmed funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Comprehensive health screening before school (required in 23 other states) would help ensure that all children are healthy and ready to learn when they begin formal education.

Implementing these sorts of policies can help to break the cycle of poverty in families:

- Continuation and expansion of programs that link employers with parents who lack the skills and experience to find jobs that will sustain their families: In Washington, Community Jobs provides transitional employment, support, and mentoring. Graduates of Community Jobs have increased their income by an average of 150 percent.

- Alignment of TANF regulations with TANF goals: Eligibility criteria for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families should be clarified so that those who have been squeezed out of the labor market can more easily get help when they need it. Allowing parents to count education, training, and child care for young children toward work requirements will help them get better jobs and raise more successful children.

- Transportation assistance, which includes subsidized bus service, "loaner" cars, carpools, and low-interest car loans: In King County, the JobSeeker Transportation program is implementing new strategies for providing transportation to low-income workers.

- Affordable education and training so workers can move up the career ladder to jobs that pay decently: Some workers are keeping their skills up-to-date with Lifelong Learning Accounts – voluntary, self-managed, portable accounts funded by employers, individuals, and public sources.

- Savings plans for low-income families: With Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) for low-income families, federal and non-federal sources match family savings at at least a 2:1 ratio – $2 for every $1 saved. These savings can be used only for education, purchasing a home, or starting a small business – all aids to climbing out of the poverty sinkhole.

- Policies that promote families: Programs that are designed to assist needy families do them a great disservice by following policies that discourage marriage. Children are less likely to live in poverty if their parents are married. The government need not promote marriage, but it should remove bureaucratic obstacles to forming a legal relationship that protects and enriches the lives of most children.

Getting parents into the workforce is not enough. They need support for child care, healthcare, transportation, and education. They – and their children – need help dealing with the stresses associated with poverty. Low-income parents want to be able to support their families, and they are working hard. As a society, we need to help them close the gap between hard work and the reward they seek – the promise of a better future for their children.

KEY INDICATORS

Mirroring national trends, Washington's child population has changed dramatically over the past decade. The 1990s saw an especially large increase in populations of minority children:

- 106 percent increase in children of Hispanic origin
- 35 percent increase in Asian/Pacific Islander children
- 16 percent increase in African American children
- 6 percent increase in white children

Thirty-nine percent of all immigrants in Washington arrived in the United States between 1990 and 2000, with 1 out of every 5 arriving between 1995 and 2000.

The number of children living in single-parent households is on the rise. However, the rising proportion of single-parent households is not due to an increase in teen birth rates. In fact, both teen pregnancy and teen birth rates continue to drop in our state.

These changes merit further review, as high poverty rates are associated with minority and immigrant populations and single-parent households – especially single-mother households.

KEY INDICATORS	THEN	NOW	TREND
TEEN BIRTH RATE (PER 1,000 15- TO 17-YEAR OLDS)	22.4 (1999)	20.4 (2000)	BETTER
TEEN PREGNANCY RATE (PER 1,000 15- TO 17-YEAR OLDS)	39.2 (1999)	36.3 (2000)	BETTER
BIRTHS TO UNMARRIED MOTHERS (PERCENT OF ALL BIRTHS)	27.9% (1999)	28.2% (2000)	NO CHANGE
DIVORCES INVOLVING CHILDREN	14,714 (1999)	13,999 (2000)	BETTER

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE STATE

POPULATION GROWTH

Between 1990 and 2000, Washington State's population increased by 20 percent (from approximately 4.9 million to 5.9 million), compared to an increase of only 13 percent for the United States. Twelve counties in Washington experienced population growth rates in excess of 25 percent. In addition, Washington's child population growth outpaced the national average, with the number of children in Washington increasing 20 percent (from 1.26 million to 1.51 million), while the number of children in the United States increased by only 14 percent.

RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY

In Washington, the child population is more diverse than the adult population. Approximately 82 percent of adults are white, compared to only 71 percent of children. Chart 1 illustrates the current breakdown of Washington's child population by race/ethnicity. Approximately 12 percent of all Washington children and 6 percent of all Washington adults are of Hispanic origin, making Hispanics the largest minority group in Washington. Washington's child population is comprised of 5 percent Asians/Pacific Islanders (approximately 90 percent of whom are Asians), 4 percent African Americans, and 2 percent Native Americans.

The diversity of Washington's child population has increased significantly in the last ten years (Chart 2). Over that period, the number of children of Hispanic origin in Washington increased by 106 percent. In seven Washington counties, Hispanics comprise more than 25 percent of the child population, and in three counties they comprise more than 50 percent. The number of Asian/Pacific Islander children increased by 35 percent and the number of African American children increased by 16 percent, whereas the number of white children increased by only 6 percent.

The increased diversity of Washington's children is partially due to a recent influx of immigrants to the state. Thirty nine percent of all immigrants in Washington arrived in the United States between 1990 and 2000, with 1 out of every 5 arriving between 1995 and 2000. Of the approximately 441,000 Hispanics and 342,000 Asians/Pacific Islanders in Washington, about 18 percent (81,000 Hispanics and 61,000 Asians/Pacific Islanders, Chart 3) immigrated to the United States between 1990 and 2000. Currently, about 33 percent of

CHART 1

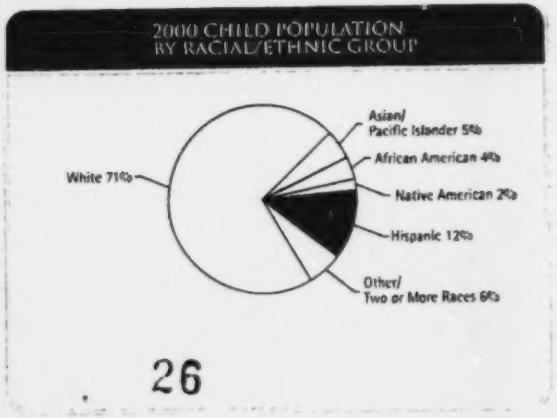


CHART 2

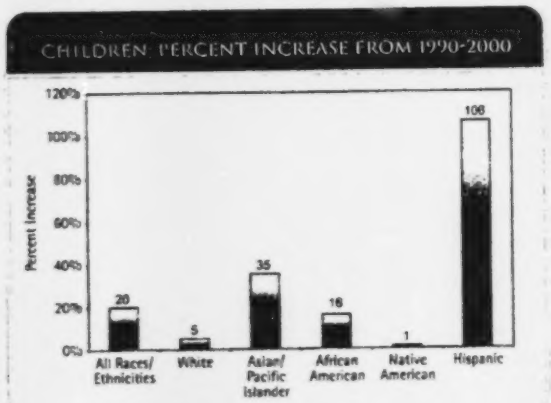
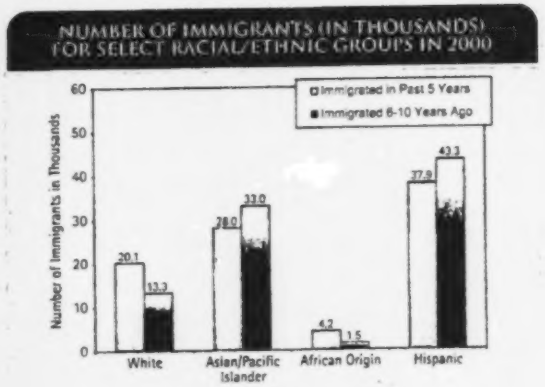


CHART 3



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the Hispanic population and 52 percent of the Asian/Pacific Islander population in Washington are immigrants.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Family structures have also changed significantly over the past decade. From 1990 to 2000, the percentage of children living in married couple families dropped from 73 percent to 69 percent, while the percentage of children living in single-parent families increased from 20 percent to 22 percent. African American and Native American children are most likely to live in single-parent households, with 45 percent of African American children and 37 percent of Native American children living with single parents (Chart 4). In contrast, 20 percent of white children and 15 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander children (15 percent of Asian children and 23 percent of Pacific Islander children) live in single-parent households.

More children are also living in multi-generational families. Over 57,000 households (2.5 percent) in Washington State are multi-generational. In 63 percent of these multi-generational households, grandparents are the heads of the household. Forty-two percent of grandparents whose grandchildren live with them consider themselves responsible for meeting the basic needs of their grandchildren. Of these grandparents, 79 percent have been caring for their grandchildren for five or more years.

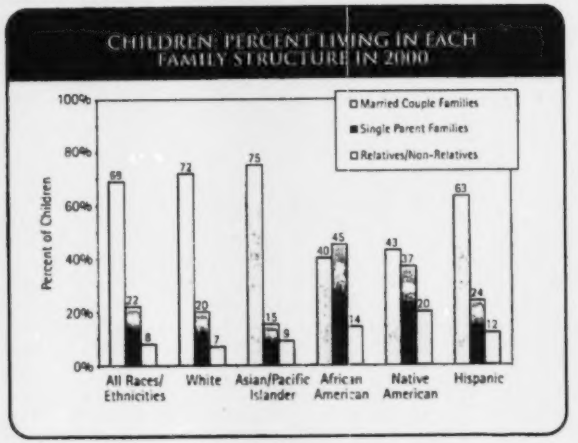
THE POVERTY CONNECTION

Diversity and family structure are associated with several measures of family and child well-being, including poverty.

Twelve percent of Washington's white children and 18 percent of Asians/Pacific Islanders live in poverty. In contrast, 37 percent of Native American, 35 percent of Hispanic, and 30 percent of African American children live in poverty.

For immigrants, poverty status is closely tied to the length of time they have lived in the United States. Chart 5 shows that poverty is most prevalent for Washington families that immigrated within the past five years, with 63 percent living below the federal poverty level. The poverty rate for immigrants with children decreases the longer they stay in the United States, reaching parity with the poverty rate for the US-born population after 16 years. Most experts agree that income at the federal

CHART 4



poverty level is not adequate for raising children; an adequate income is commonly defined as twice the federal poverty level. Given this definition, more than half of all immigrant parents who have lived in the United States for 10 years do not earn enough to support their families.

Poverty is more prevalent for children in single-parent families than it is for children in married-couple families, and is especially common for children living with single mothers. Chart 6 illustrates that 58 percent of all children under 5 years old and 38 percent of children 5 to 17 years old who live with single mothers live in poverty. The poverty rate for children living with single mothers is approximately twice the poverty rate for children living with single fathers. Of grandparents responsible for the basic needs of their grandchildren, 12 percent have incomes below the federal poverty level, while in the general population only about 7 percent of those 55 and older have incomes that low.

SUPPORTING DIVERSITY

Clearly, the face of Washington State is changing. Policymakers must seek ways to support our ever more diverse population of families and children. We can enlist several kinds of supports:

- Better healthcare policies for children: Although the return on investment in preventive healthcare and nutrition is well-documented, Washington recently eliminated Medicaid eligibility for more than 25,000 immigrant children. This elimination is particularly disturbing since Medicaid-supported interpretive services are unavailable through the state's Basic Health Plan. In addition to making healthcare available to all children, we must work to break down barriers to access including: few to no providers in rural areas, fewer providers accepting Medicaid, limited availability of interpreters, and limited opportunities for providers to receive training in culturally sensitive care.
- Emotional and mental health support for parents and their children: Many parents are struggling alone or are isolated from social support due to language, culture, or race/ethnicity. These families need supportive mental health services to aid them in ensuring their children develop to their maximum potential.
- Policies that promote families: Programs that were designed to assist needy families do them a great disservice by following policies that discourage marriage. Children are less likely to live in poverty if their parents are married. The government need not promote marriage, but it should remove bureaucratic obstacles to forming a legal relationship that protects and enriches the lives of most children.

CHART 5

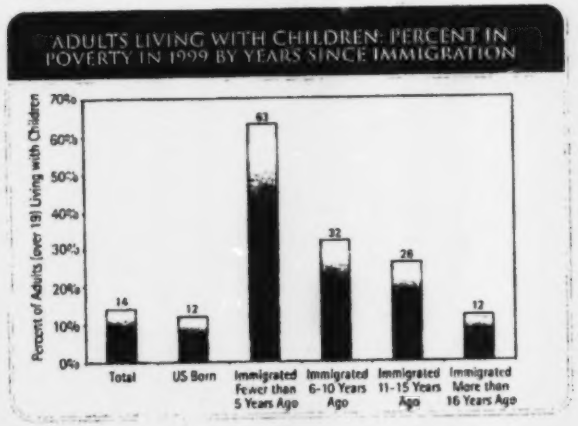
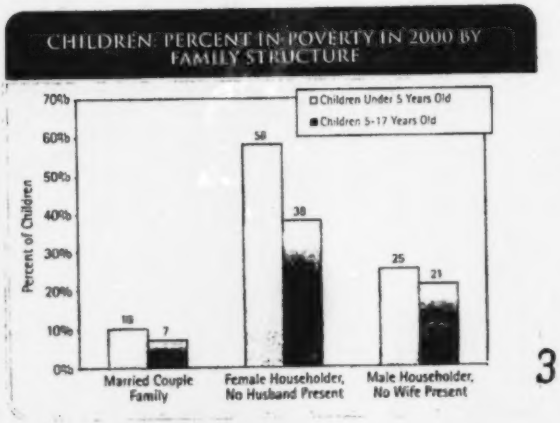


CHART 6



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KEY INDICATORS

It is no surprise to Washington State residents that our economy faces substantial challenges as we approach the end of the 2002 fiscal year. Almost 65,000 jobs were lost between April of 2001 and April of 2002. Job loss means more than lost income; it often also means loss of health insurance, retirement and savings funds, family leave, sick leave, child care, and skills training. Although dramatic, the economic slide of the past year was not a complete surprise because average real wages had not risen from 1999 to 2000 and per capita income declined slightly between 2000 and 2001.

What may be surprising to Washington citizens is that, even at the very beginning of the economic downturn, large numbers of children lived in families struggling to make ends meet. Despite a booming economy, the 1990s saw no substantial improvement in the child poverty rate. By late 2000, an estimated quarter million children in Washington (1 out of every 6) lived in households with income below the federal poverty level. An additional quarter million children were living in households with income above poverty but below two times the federal poverty level.

The number of children living in families with incomes below two times the federal poverty level is of particular concern. Research indicates that a family needs a minimum income of twice the federal poverty level to meet basic needs without being forced to make hard choices between health care, child care, housing, and food. To earn a minimum adequate income in 2000, a single mother with two children who was working full-time needed to make almost $14 an hour.

Given the current economic climate of job losses and limited government and philanthropic resources, meeting the growing needs of low-income working families is one of Washington's greatest challenges.

KEY INDICATORS	THEN	NOW	TREND
AVERAGE REAL WAGES (IN 2000 DOLLARS)	$36,958 (1999)	$37,070 (2000)	NO CHANGE
PER CAPITA INCOME (IN 2001 DOLLARS)	$32,119 (2000)	$31,582* (2001)	NO CHANGE
ANNUAL CHILDCARE COST (IN 2000 DOLLARS)	$5,508 (1998)	$5,808 (2000)	WORSE
CHILDCARE COST AS PERCENT OF TAKE-HOME WAGES (SINGLE PARENT EARNER)	19.1% (1998)	19.1% (2000)	NO CHANGE

* PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE

MEETING THE NEEDS OF LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES

Many misconceptions cloud our understanding of the economic realities of low-income working families. In this section, we try to correct several of these misconceptions.

FACT: POVERTY DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTS CHILDREN

One misconception is that poverty affects people of all ages equally. In reality, poverty is more prevalent among children than adults. While children account for only 1 out of every 4 people in our state, they account for 1 out of every 3 people in poverty. Very young children are hit especially hard, with 21 percent of children under the age of 5 living in poverty in 2000, compared to 10 percent of adults (Chart 1).

FACT: POVERTY RATES ARE HIGHER IN RURAL AREAS

Child poverty is often construed as an urban concern, while rural poverty is overlooked. In reality, for both young children and adults, the poverty rate outside the Metro Puget Sound region (King, Snohomish, and Pierce Counties) is more than 30 percent higher than the poverty rate inside the metro area (Chart 1). Compounding the effects of poverty, services (child care, health care, as well as need-based services) tend to be concentrated within metropolitan areas.

FACT: JOBS ALONE DO NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY

Ensuring that all people are employed has been touted as "the" solution for the problem of poverty. However, in 3 out of every 4 families living in poverty in 2000 (73 percent), one or two adults in the household were working. A single, non-working parent headed only 17 percent of families with income below the federal poverty level (Chart 2). For single parents, movement into work is complicated by the high cost of child care. To work full-time in Washington, a parent must spend an average of $5,808 a year for care for just one child.

In addition, depending on jobs alone to eliminate poverty assumes a consistently healthy economy with an ever-expanding supply of jobs that pay well. Between April 2001 and April 2002, more than 55,000 jobs were lost in the manufacturing, wholesale/retail, and service sectors alone (Chart 3). These sectors (3 of the 4 top employment sectors in Washington) comprise over half of our state's workforce. In addition, 15,000 jobs were lost in the construction industry. All job losses occurred after the 2000 poverty estimates came out, suggesting that 2001 and 2002 poverty rates may be substantially higher than the numbers cited here.

FACT: MANY FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM SOCIAL SERVICES

Many people believe that food banks, TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families – post-1996 "welfare"), Medicaid,

CHART 1

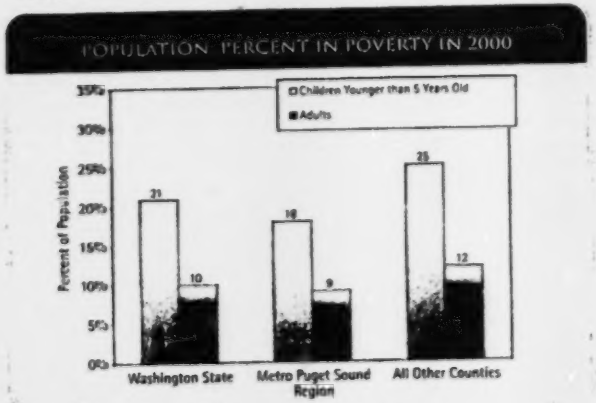
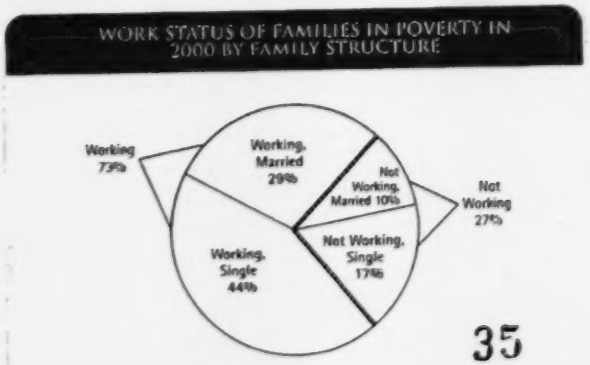


CHART 2


WORK STATUS OF FAMILIES IN POVERTY IN 2000 BY FAMILY STRUCTURE
Working 73%
Working, Married 29%
Not Working, Married 10%
Not Working 27%
Working, Single 44%
Not Working, Single 17%

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and other programs for low-income families serve only a small proportion of the people in our state, and that they primarily serve large families with lots of children. On every count, these perceptions are off-base.

Hunger is a significant problem in our state. Washington is consistently ranked among the top five states where people report experiencing hunger or worrying about being able to feed their families. Between July 2000 and July 2001 a stunning 1.1 million individuals (1 out of every 5 people in the state) from almost 350,000 families visited food banks, for a total of over 5.5 million visits. More than 102,000 of these food-bank clients were children, and over 64,000 were infants (0-2 years of age). Responding to the weakened economy, demands on food banks have increased sharply in the recent past (see Chart 4).

Similarly, in the 2001 State Fiscal Year (SFY), Washington processed an average of 144,000 Food Stamp cases per month. The current (2002) State Fiscal Year's average is estimated at close to 167,000 per month, approximating a 16 percent increase (Chart 4). And, due to social stigma, language barriers, and voluminous paperwork, many individuals who are eligible for food stamps do not apply.

Hunger can be especially devastating for young children, whose mental and physical development can be permanently impaired if they are deprived of crucial nutrients. A large proportion of Washington's youngsters benefit from services designed to improve outcomes during the critical developmental period of early childhood:

- In 2000, Medicaid paid for almost 26,000 births – almost one-third (31.3 percent) of all births in the state.
- Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides short-term, low-cost, preventive health services to young families who are at risk due to low income and nutritionally related health conditions.

CHART 3

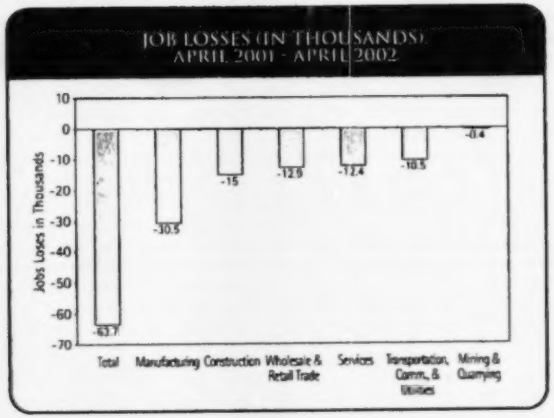
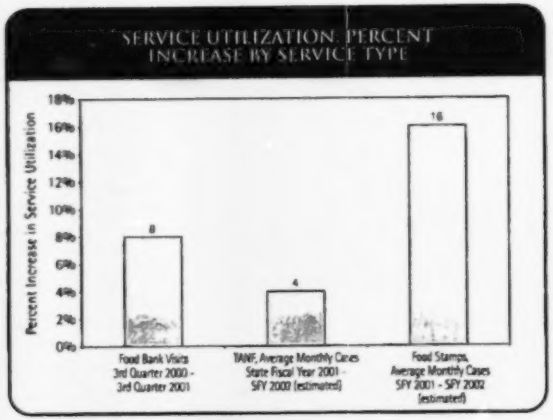


CHART 4



- Throughout the 1990s, approximately one-third of babies were born to mothers who received WIC services during their pregnancies.
- In 2000, WIC provided services during pregnancy to the mothers of more than 29,000 babies (36 percent of total births in the state).
- In 2001, WIC served over 200,000 young children, half of all children under the age of 5 in Washington.

The families using these services are not atypically large. In fact, in December of 2001, almost three-fourths (72 percent) of families receiving TANF had no more than two children, with almost half (44 percent) having only one child.

FACT: RACIAL/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY PERSIST

In theory, all people have equal opportunities to achieve the American Dream. In reality, sharp racial/ethnic income differences persist in our state. The poverty rate for African American, Native American, and Hispanic children is three times that of white children. In 1999, the median family income for Native Americans and Hispanics was approximately half that of whites. For African Americans, the median family income barely exceeded the minimum adequate income needed for a family of four (Chart 5).

Home ownership, a key marker of achieving the American Dream, is rife with racial/ethnic disparities. At 67 percent, white householders have substantially higher home ownership rates than all other minority groups (Chart 6). While Asian/Pacific Islander householders (at 56 percent) have home ownership rates similar to that of white householders, when Pacific Islander householders are considered as a separate group their home ownership rate is only 41 percent. And, despite a median income above the minimum adequate income level for a family of four, just over one-third of African American householders own their homes.

UNLOCKING NEED-BASED SERVICES

Many social service programs that help working parents (King County's JobSeeker Transportation program, for example) get their clients through social service agencies. However, language, cultural, legal, and information barriers often prevent potential clients from taking advantage of these services. At a time when our state is trimming every ounce of fat from its budget, we recommend that existing programs do everything they can to bolster their outreach and education efforts. Complex instructions should be simplified, and translation services should be supplied where needed. Especially in times of economic crisis, we cannot overlook the needs of low-income families.

CHART 5

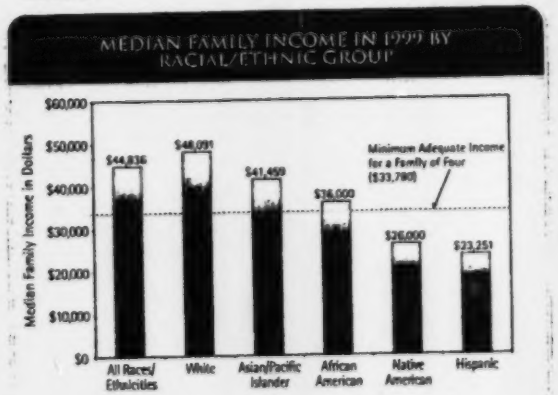
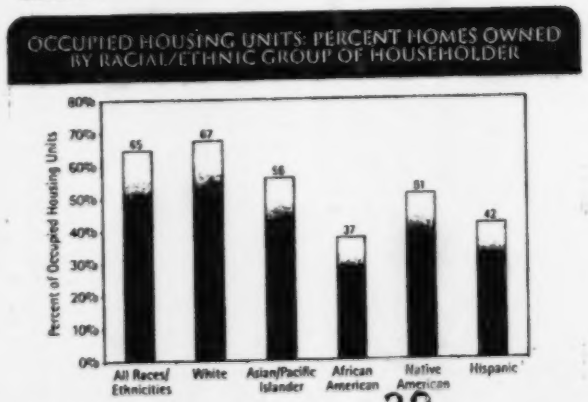


CHART 6



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KEY INDICATORS

Student performance on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) continues to concern educators and lawmakers. During the past year, the tight coupling of education and income has become increasingly apparent. At the same time that our economy lost a significant number of manufacturing jobs, the only jobs with more openings were those requiring advanced math and technical education. Continued poor performance on the math portion of the WASL may foreshadow a bigger problem in the future: a workforce that lacks the skills and education for 21st century needs.

- Both 4th and 10th grade students continue to perform well on the reading section of the WASL. Over 70 percent of students in these grades are meeting basic reading standards.
- Students continue to fail the math portion of the WASL at an alarming rate. At all grade levels, fewer than half of Washington students meet basic standards on this test.
- Of those adults currently living with a child, 1 out of every 3 with only a high school diploma does not earn an income adequate to support a family.
- The racial/ethnic groups with the lowest incomes are also the groups whose children are struggling on the WASL and who show the lowest educational attainment in adulthood.

KEY INDICATORS	THEN	NOW	TREND
PERCENT OF 4TH GRADERS MEETING BASIC STANDARDS			
MATH	48%	50%	NO CHANGE
READING	74%	75%	NO CHANGE
	(2000)	(2001)	
PERCENT OF 7TH GRADERS MEETING BASIC STANDARDS			
MATH	33%	32%	NO CHANGE
READING	48%	47%	NO CHANGE
	(2000)	(2001)	
PERCENT OF 10TH GRADERS MEETING BASIC STANDARDS			
MATH	41%	46%	BETTER
READING	71%	73%	NO CHANGE
	(2000)	(2001)	
SELECT MINORITIES VS. WHITE CHILDREN- EXTENT OF THE GAP			
4TH GRADE			
MATH	-6.0%	-5.9%	NO CHANGE
READING	-2.9%	-2.9%	NO CHANGE
7TH GRADE			
MATH	-10.0%	-9.4%	BETTER
READING	-3.8%	-3.0%	BETTER
10TH GRADE			
MATH	-6.9%	-8.0%	WORSE
READING	-3.9%	-4.3%	WORSE
	(2000)	(2001)	

THE CYCLE OF POVERTY AND EDUCATION

EARLY CHILD CARE AND EDUCATION

It has become increasingly clear to both lawmakers and researchers that early child care experiences can have a profound impact on the later development and educational achievement of a child. By the age of 4, about 80 percent of all children are in non-parental care. In the state of Washington, children under the age of 5 who are in non-parental care typically spend well over 12 hours a week in care (Chart 1).

While the amount of time a child spends in care is related to the type of care the child is receiving, hours in care is not directly dependent on income. Children of low-income families do not spend more time in Center Care, Family Child Care (care provided by a non-relative in the caregiver's home), or care being provided by a friend, family member or neighbor than do children from families with adequate incomes (low-income is defined as family income at or below two times the federal poverty level).

Income does play a role, however, in the type of care that a child receives (Chart 2). Children in families with less than adequate income are less likely to be in center care than children in families with more than adequate income. Therefore, poverty early in life appears to impact the early care opportunities available to children.

ACHIEVEMENT AMONG SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

Over the past three years, students in the state of Washington have shown overall improvement on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), with statewide trends showing a steady increase in the number of students meeting basic math and reading standards. However, a large proportion of students at all grade levels continue to have problems meeting basic state standards on the math portion of the WASL.

In 2001, only 46 percent of all 10th graders met basic standards in math (Chart 3). White and Asian/Pacific Islander students continued to outperform other racial/ethnic groups. However, even among these students, barely half met basic math standards last year.

Despite these improvements, substantial gaps in WASL performance still exist between racial/ethnic groups. Math scores of 10th grade African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics are 6 to 8 percent lower than scores for white students (Chart 4). In the past three years, these gaps have shown little improvement.

CHART 1

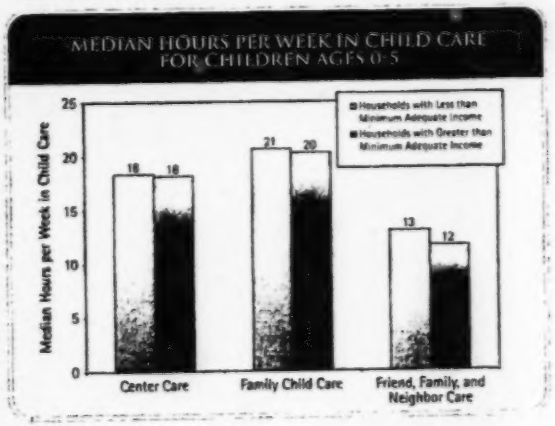
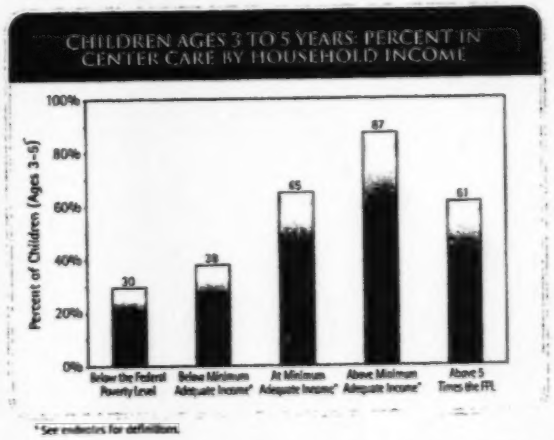
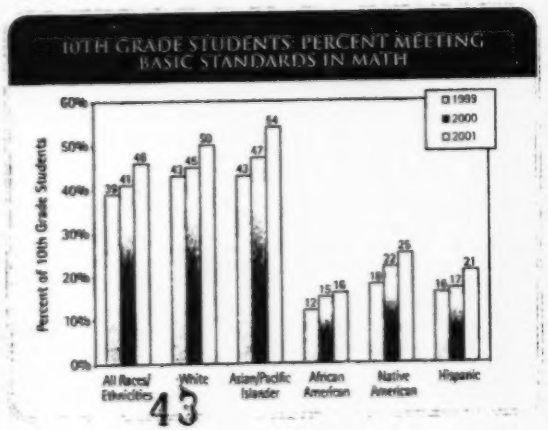


CHART 2



* See endnotes for definitions.

CHART 3



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While the achievement gap appears to highlight a major difference between racial/ethnic groups, closer analyses have shown that poverty is a bigger predictor of low achievement than race/ethnicity. Racial/ethnic minorities anchor the low end of the achievement gap because they are over represented in low-income groups. As shown in the *Economic Well-Being* chapter, Native American and Hispanic families have median incomes below the minimum adequate income level. African American families have a median income only slightly above the minimum adequate income level. Clearly, the racial/ethnic groups struggling to make ends meet are the same groups struggling on the WASL.

The large gap between racial/ethnic groups in math achievement is particularly disturbing in today's economic climate. The number of jobs in Washington's manufacturing sector has declined significantly over the past year. At the same time, one of the few job sectors to show any growth was the math-heavy accounting and real estate sector. The achievement gap in math will inevitably reduce certain students' ability to compete in the sector showing the greatest growth and best wages, further perpetuating their low-income status.

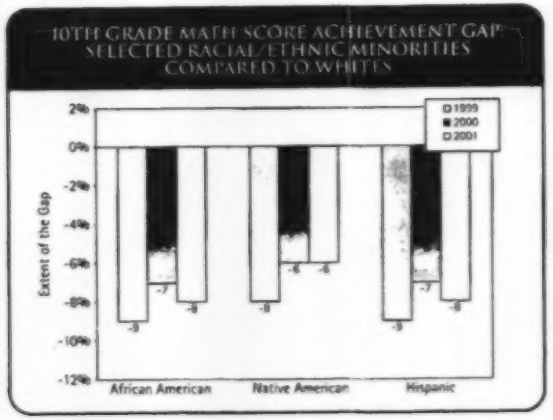
ADULT INCOME AND EDUCATION

Educational attainment is closely linked with earnings (Chart 5). Of Washington adults living with at least one child, over 90 percent who completed a Bachelor's Degree or higher earn an adequate family income. In stark contrast, only 31 percent of adults with no high school diploma and 67 percent with a high school diploma have adequate family incomes.

Racial/ethnic groups differ sharply in adult educational attainment (Chart 6). Between 36 and 41 percent of white and Asian/Pacific Islander adults living with children have a Bachelor's Degree or higher. However, only 11 to 18 percent of African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics attain this level of education.

Higher education for parents paves the way to all kinds of advantages for children. Parents with only a high-school education have a hard time affording quality arrangements for the early care and education of their children. School-age children in low-income families are more likely to have problems on achievement tests, which in turn impacts their ability to attend college and earn a decent wage. Through this cycle of educational disadvantage, the cycle of poverty will be perpetuated.

CHART 4



BREAKING THE CYCLE

As noted in the opening essay, education is the elixir of advancement – the universally acknowledged ingredient that makes it possible to climb a career ladder and rise above subsistence earnings. The following strategies can help boost educational attainment for all families:

- Creative ways to provide, pay for, and improve the quality of early care and education available to the children of working parents: Affordable, dependable, high-quality care is a top priority for working parents, but current subsidies reach only a fraction of those needing assistance.
- Increased institutional and community support for involving parents with their children's schools: Low-income parents, particularly those for whom English is a second language, face many barriers to forging strong connections between home and school.
  - Flexible scheduling in the workplace enables parents to meet with teachers and attend school events.
  - Adult literacy programs equip parents to participate more fully in their children's education.
  - Programs that foster cultural sharing help teachers to tap the wealth of their students' diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- Continuation and expansion of programs that link employers with parents who lack skills and work experience: In addition to helping parents get jobs, effective programs provide ongoing support to employees as they integrate into the workforce.
- Affordable education and training so workers can move up the career ladder to jobs that pay decently: State investment in publicly funded higher education (including scholarships) is critical to ensure that low-income families will have continuing access to educational opportunities.

CHART 5

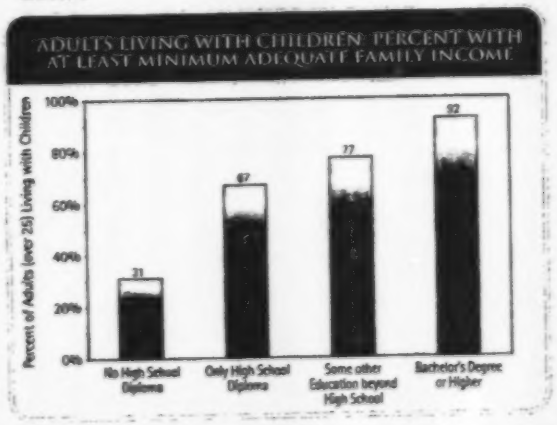
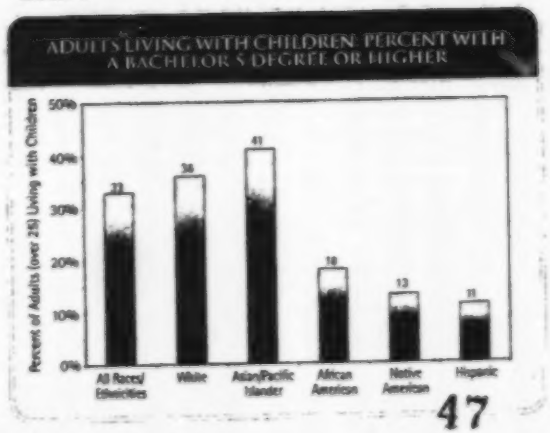


CHART 6



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KEY INDICATORS

The health of Washington's children is generally good, and recent data suggest improvement on several fronts. Between 1999 and 2000, deaths from medical conditions declined for both 1- to 9-year olds and 10- to 14-year olds. Suicide mortality, which has been increasing for the past several years, declined by approximately 25 percent from 1999 to 2000. While the number of low-birthweight infants did not change significantly from 1999 to 2000, Washington still has one of the lowest rates of low-birthweight infants in the country.

Despite these positive indicators, much work remains to be done, especially with regard to obesity. The proportion of children and adolescents in the United States who are overweight has increased from 5 percent in the early 1970s to 14 percent in 1999. Healthy People 2010, a national prevention agenda developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has set a goal of reducing childhood obesity to its previous level of 5 percent.

Statewide information on youth obesity in Washington is not available, but a recent survey of Seattle youth indicates that 9 percent of male and 6 percent of female adolescents are overweight and an additional 15 percent of males and 11 percent of females are "at risk" for future obesity.

Encouraging physical education in schools and directing physicians' attention to youth weight issues are two potential strategies for curbing youth obesity. However, implementing these preventative measures will require greater support for education and health services as:

- Schools struggle to make ends meet with shrinking budgets and confront increasing demands for student achievement of basic standards,
- Physicians face continued pressures to reduce costs, and
- Individuals struggle with higher co-payment rates and reduced coverage.

KEY INDICATORS	THEN	NOW	TREND
LOW BIRTHWEIGHT RATE (PERCENT OF ALL BIRTHS)	5.8% (1999)	5.8% (2000)	NO CHANGE
PERCENT OF 2-YEAR OLDS FULLY IMMUNIZED	65.5% (1999)	71.2% (2000)	BETTER
MORTALITY FROM MEDICAL CONDITIONS			
(DEATHS PER 100,000 1- TO 9-YEAR OLDS)	13.2	11.2	BETTER
(DEATHS PER 100,000 10- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	10.7 (1999)	9.9 (2000)	BETTER
SUICIDE MORTALITY (DEATHS PER 100,000 15- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	7.6 (1999)	5.6 (2000)	BETTER

OBESITY AND YOUTH

Obesity in both adults and children has been recognized as a growing problem at the national level. As illustrated in Figure 1, over the past decade the prevalence of obesity has increased dramatically in every state in the union. Similarly, the proportion of children and adolescents in the United States who are overweight has increased from 5 percent in the early 1970s to 14 percent in 1999 (Chart 1).

Obesity has long been associated with negative health outcomes in later life, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The adverse health consequences of obesity are now showing up earlier than ever. For example, an increasing number of youth are diagnosed each year with Type II Diabetes, which previously was considered a disease of overweight older adults. In addition, being overweight can increase the severity of symptoms in common childhood health problems such as asthma.

OVERWEIGHT YOUTH

Youth are considered overweight if, based on national standards, their weight is above the 95th percentile for their height, age, and gender. Those between the 85th and 95th percentiles are considered "at risk" for being overweight, and those below the 85th percentile are classified as being of normal weight (although some of those youth may actually be underweight).

According to the Seattle Public Schools 1999 Teen Health Survey:

- Nine percent of high school males and 6 percent of females were significantly overweight. While lower than the national average, this is higher than the Healthy People 2010 goal of 5 percent.
- An additional 15 percent of males and 11 percent of females were "at risk" for future obesity.

PERCEPTIONS OF WEIGHT

Children and adolescents do not always accurately perceive their weight. This is especially problematic in females, as it can lead to inappropriate dieting among those who are of normal weight or even underweight. Not surprisingly, the weight perceptions of Seattle male and female adolescents differed significantly. While males were more likely to be overweight, females were more likely to feel overweight (Chart 2). Differences were also observed between white and African American adolescents (Chart 3).

YOUTH DIETING

Previous research has shown that youth sometimes try to lose weight even though they are not clinically overweight. Furthermore, they may use unhealthy dieting tactics, depriving themselves of essential nutrients, and leading to subsequent health problems. For example, inadequate calcium intake during adolescence can lead to insufficient bone density and early osteoporosis.

FIGURE 1

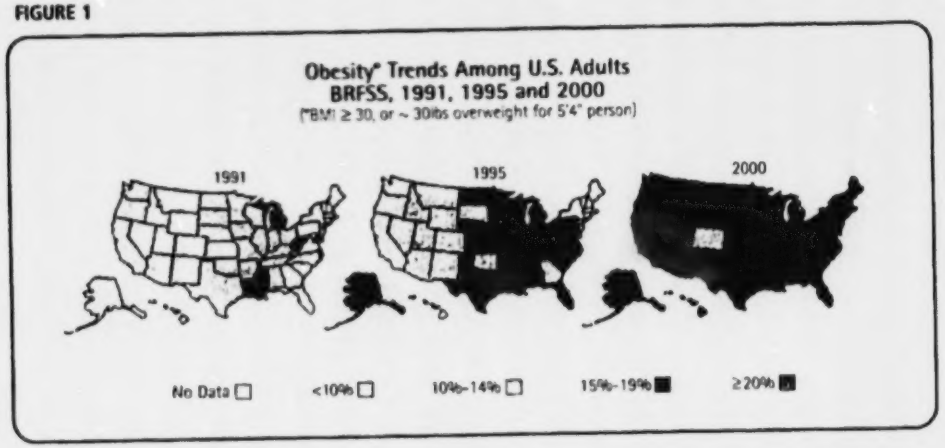
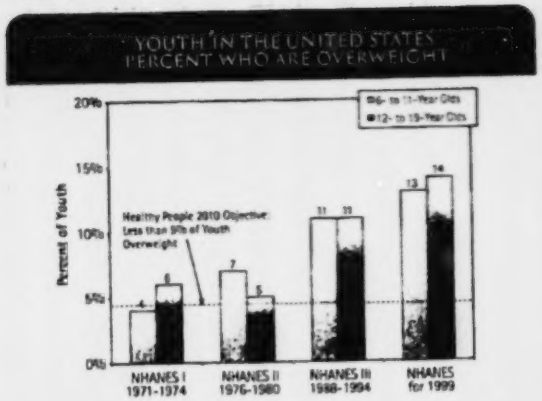


CHART 1



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In Seattle, male and female adolescents had different patterns of dieting (Chart 4). Among females trying to lose weight, relatively few reported using unhealthy strategies:

- Eight percent reported either vomiting or using laxatives or diet pills.
- Seventeen percent said they had stopped eating or had eaten very little.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIY AND TELEVISION VIEWING

Numerous studies have associated regular physical exercise with maintaining a healthy weight. Another Healthy People 2010 objective is to ensure that at least 85 percent of youth exercise three or more days per week. Although males in the Seattle study were more likely than females to exercise at least three days a week, neither group met the Healthy People 2010 target (Chart 5). White and African American youth did not differ significantly in their exercise habits (Chart 6). Surprisingly, the amount of exercise that Seattle children reported bore no significant relation to their being over-weight. The survey did not ask exactly how long a student exercised each day or for how many weeks the student had been exercising.

For both youth and adults, increased television viewing was associated with decreased physical activity and fitness. An associated Healthy People 2010 objective is to increase to 75 percent the proportion of youth who watch television no more than two hours a day. In Seattle, white adolescents have already attained this goal (Chart 6). Males and females did not differ significantly in television viewing, but neither group has meet the Healthy People 2010 goal (Chart 5).

PARENTAL OBESITY AND HEALTH BEHAVIORS

When it comes to eating and exercise, children and adolescents tend to mirror their parents' behavior. Among Washington adults who had children living with them in 2000:

CHART 2

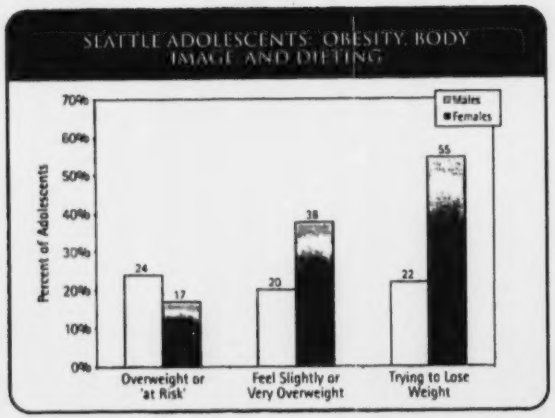
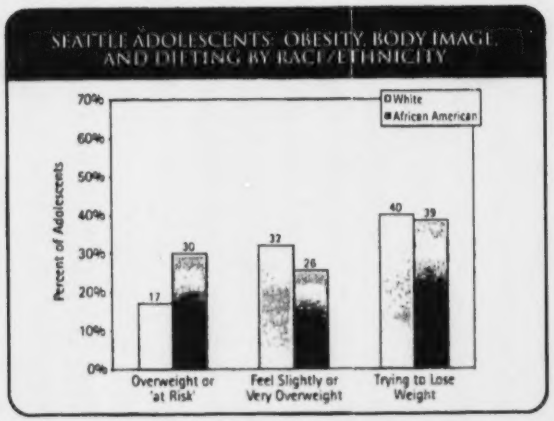


CHART 3



- Twenty-two percent of men and 16 percent of women were obese.
- An additional 47 percent of men and 26 percent of women were overweight.
- Thirty-four percent of men and 52 percent of women reported attempting to lose weight.
- Eighty-nine percent of men who were trying to lose weight were overweight or obese, compared to only 58 percent of women.
- Among those who were overweight or obese, 44 percent of men and 72 percent of women were trying to lose weight.

CONCLUSIONS

The 1999 survey only covered youth in Seattle public schools. However, a statewide survey found that adults in Seattle were less likely to be obese or overweight than adults in the rest of Washington. If the same is true among youth, the data presented here provide a conservative estimate of the obesity problem among Washington's adolescents. The trend toward obesity shows no signs of abating. Obese youth tend to become obese adults. And, obese adults tend to produce obese children. Current statistics on obesity do not paint an optimistic picture for the future health of our state's population.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

One objective of Healthy People 2010 is that elementary and secondary schools require daily physical education classes with vigorous physical activity. In a national survey, only 29 percent of adolescents reported having daily physical education classes. Among adolescents attending physical education classes, only half reported that the class usually involved at least 30 minutes of actual exercise or sports activities. Although Washington State has "Essential Academic Learning Requirements" for health and fitness, daily physical education classes are not currently required.

In addition to bolstering school physical education programs, we also need to treat youngsters who are currently overweight. A recent national survey of healthcare providers found that while the vast majority of pediatricians believed that overweight children and adolescents needed treatment, several barriers prevented effective treatment. Fifty-eight percent of pediatricians felt they did not have enough time to address weight control with patients; 46 percent felt insurance companies would not adequately reimburse them for their services; and 45 percent felt that they did not have the skills to address weight control in youth.

CHART 4

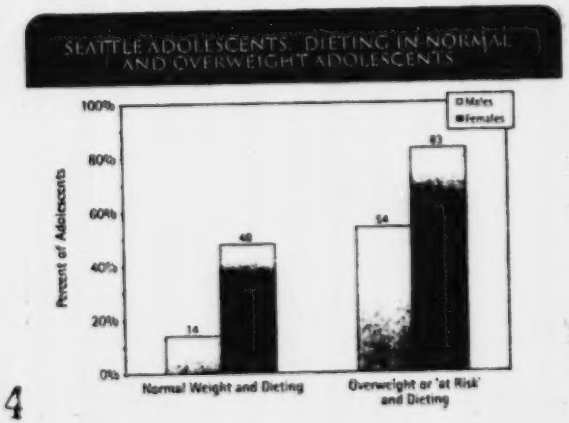


CHART 5

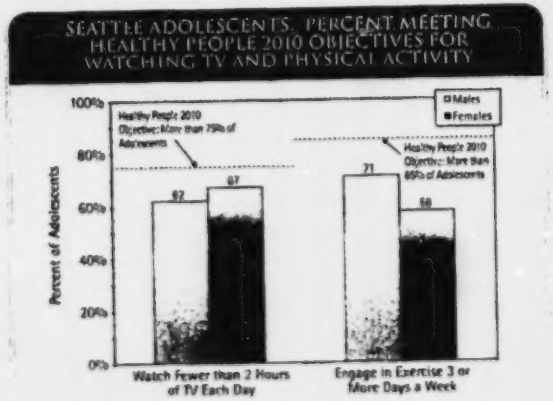
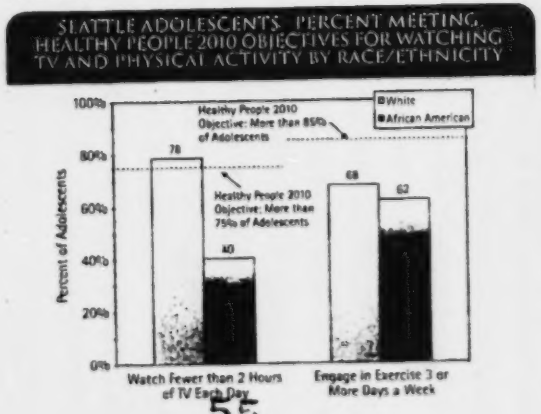


CHART 6



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KEY INDICATORS

Creating a safe and secure environment for the children of Washington has long been an important goal for civic leaders and policy makers. Several key indicators have shown that, on some fronts, efforts to improve the safety and security of Washington's children have been successful.

- From 1999 to 2000, the firearm mortality rate for youth ages 15 to 19 years old decreased from 21 percent to 18 percent of all deaths.
- The suicide rate for youth 10 to 19 years old decreased dramatically from 1999 to 2000.

Also encouraging are decreases in arrest rates for juveniles.

- Among 10- to 17-year olds, the arrest rate for violent crimes decreased from 3.3 arrests per 1,000 in 1998 to 2.8 arrests per 1,000 in 2000.
- Between 1996 and 2000, the arrest rate among African American youth dropped by over 30 percent.

While lower arrest rates among Washington youth are encouraging, the overall state of juvenile justice in Washington is more complicated. A disproportionate number of minorities are still represented in Washington's juvenile justice system, and the state exceeds the national average in juvenile arrests for property offenses. Furthermore, despite the proven effectiveness of diversion programs, a declining proportion of juveniles are sent to diversion after appearing in court. Minority juveniles in particular are less likely to be sent through programs that provide alternatives to incarceration.

KEY INDICATORS	THEN	NOW	TREND
MORTALITY FROM UNINTENTIONAL INJURIES			
(DEATHS PER 100,000 0- TO 14-YEAR OLDS)	8.0	9.2	WORSE
(DEATHS PER 100,000 15- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	30.5 (1999)	33.6 (2000)	WORSE
HOMICIDE MORTALITY (DEATHS PER 100,000 15- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	6.3 (1999)	6.3 (2000)	NO CHANGE
MORTALITY DUE TO FIREARMS (DEATHS PER 100,000 15- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	13.6 (1999)	10.7 (2000)	BETTER
PERCENT OF MORTALITY DUE TO FIREARMS (PERCENT OF DEATHS OF 15- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	20.8% (1999)	17.7% (2000)	BETTER
JUVENILE ARREST RATE FOR VIOLENT CRIME (PER 1,000 10- TO 17-YEAR OLDS)	3.3 (1998)	2.8 (2000)	BETTER
JUVENILES HELD IN DETENTION (PER 1,000 10- TO 17-YEAR OLDS)	50.8 (1998)	47.4 (1999)	BETTER
MORTALITY DUE TO MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS (DEATHS PER 100,000 1- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)	7.4 (1999)	8.7 (2000)	WORSE

JUVENILE JUSTICE IN WASHINGTON STATE

Some statistics on juvenile crime and justice in Washington are encouraging. Mirroring national trends, juvenile arrest rates dropped markedly over the past decade. While minority youth have historically accounted for disproportionate numbers of juvenile arrests and confinements, Washington reduced this disparity during the 1990s.

Unfortunately, the picture is not entirely positive. While Washington's juvenile arrest rates for violent crime and drug abuse are similar to those across the country, the state's juvenile arrest rates for property offenses and alcohol violations are 70 to 85 percent higher than U.S. averages.

JUVENILE ARREST RATES

Juvenile arrest rates in Washington decreased by 24 percent since 1985 and are lower than they have been in 15 years (Chart 1). The 1994 peak in juvenile arrests was followed by several years of significant declines.

- The most substantial decreases in arrests occurred among males (Chart 2) and African Americans (Chart 3).
- Between 1996 and 2000, the arrest rate for African American youth decreased by over 30 percent.
- While the arrest rate for African American youth is still higher than for other racial/ethnic groups, 85 percent of all juvenile arrests in Washington during 2000 were of white youth (Chart 4).

While juvenile crimes in the news often involve violence or sex, these kinds of crimes account for a small fraction of juvenile arrests in Washington.

- Since 1990, juvenile arrests for violent crimes in Washington dropped by 45 percent (Chart 1). In 2000, violent offenses accounted for less than 3 percent of all juvenile arrests.
- The same decade saw a 62 percent decrease in juvenile arrests for sexual offenses, and these offenses accounted for less than 1 percent of juvenile arrests in the year 2000 (Chart 1).

DIVERSION PROGRAMS IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

Diversion programs offer an alternative to traditional court proceedings and incarceration – primarily for juveniles arrested for a first, non-violent offense. Diversion programs often involve community service, counseling, and/or teen courts. These programs vary considerably, and views about their effectiveness are mixed. On the whole, however, diversion programs are thought to be very effective. Nevertheless, during the 1990s the proportion of youth referred to diversion dropped from 48 percent to 38 percent.

Because diversion programs are not mandated by law, funding often must come from outside sources. The loss of outside funding can lead to the elimination of programs.

Referrals to diversion vary according to race/ethnicity. While approximately 40 percent of arrested white and

CHART 1

JUVENILE ARREST RATES BY TYPE OF CRIME

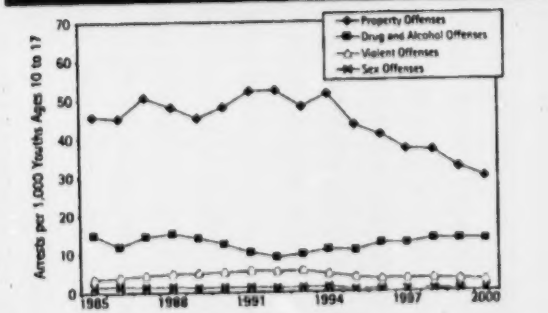
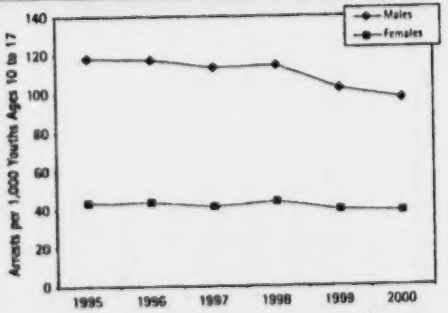


CHART 2

JUVENILE ARREST RATES BY GENDER



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Asian/Pacific Islander youth were referred to diversion in Washington in 2000, the diversion rate among African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth was only about 30 percent (Chart 5). It is not clear whether these differences are linked to differences in the distribution of offenses or whether other factors are involved. Similar disparities have been observed in other states, some of which are employing case advocates to address this issue. Using such advocates has reduced recidivism rates.

Completion of diversion contracts also differs as a function of race/ethnicity.

- Among juveniles referred to diversion during 2000, Hispanic youth were most likely to complete (84 percent), followed by white and Asian/Pacific Islander youth (74 percent).
- Native American and African American youth were least likely to complete diversion programs, at 63 percent and 59 percent, respectively.

Family and community support can help youth complete diversion programs. Youth who do not complete their diversion programs are generally referred back to the court system.

DETENTION AND RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

Some young people are held in juvenile detention facilities while they await court hearings; others are sentenced to such facilities by the courts after conviction. Although Washington's juvenile arrest rate has dropped significantly over the past decade, use of juvenile justice detention facilities has increased during the same period.

- Total admissions to youth detention facilities increased by 80 percent between 1990 and 2000, with more than 34,000 admissions in the year 2000 alone.
- The proportion of female detention admissions increased from 17 percent in 1990 to 26 percent in 2000.

Minority overrepresentation in juvenile detention facilities has decreased steadily; in 2000, 29 percent of detention admissions were for minority youth. This trend has been particularly striking for African American youth. African American youth accounted for 12 percent of detention admissions in 2000, compared to 17 percent in 1993.

CHART 3

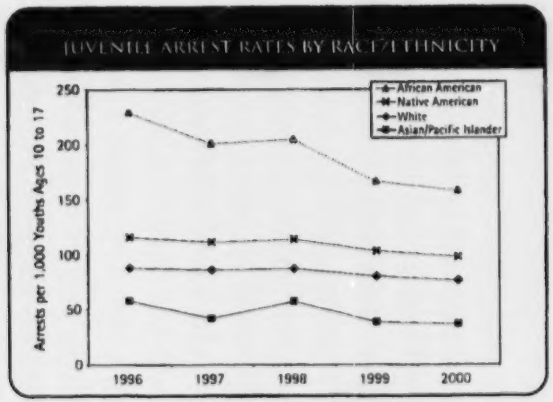
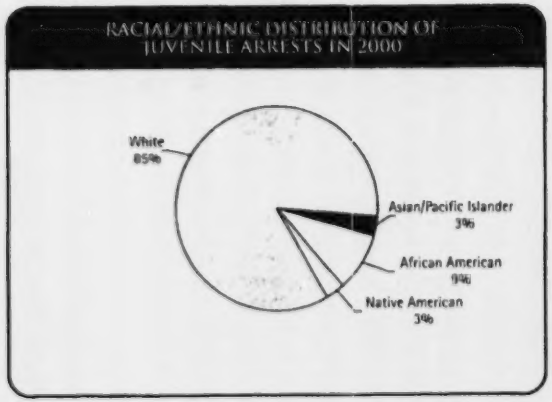


CHART 4



After release from juvenile justice facilities, many youth move into the juvenile justice parole program. Between 1990 and 2000, the average daily census of this program increased by 175 percent (Chart 6).

Sometimes more severe and chronic juvenile offenders are placed in Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration (JRA) residential facilities. Nationally, about one-third of juvenile court cases lead to placement in a residential facility.

- The average daily census of Washington's JRA facilities increased steadily during the early 1990s and peaked in 1997 with approximately 1,400 youth in JRA residential facilities on any given day (Chart 6).
- Females have consistently accounted for about 8 percent of youth in our state's JRA residential facilities.
- Racial/ethnic minority youth have consistently accounted for about 45 percent of the population in JRA residential facilities. However, African American youth accounted for 19 percent of youth in JRA residential facilities in 2000, compared to 25 percent in 1991.

Despite these trends, minority youth are still overrepresented in Washington's juvenile justice system. During the year 2000, African American youth accounted for:

- 4 percent of Washington's youth population,
- 9 percent of Washington's juvenile arrests,
- 6 percent of arrested juveniles referred to diversion programs,
- 12 percent of admissions to Washington's juvenile detention centers, and
- 19 percent of juveniles in a JRA residential facility.

WHAT WE NEED TO DO

The overrepresentation of racial/ethnic minorities in Washington's juvenile justice system is an important but controversial issue. To determine whether racial/ethnic bias is causing this disparity, we would need to be able to compare statistics for detention, diversion, and confinement among juveniles arrested for similar crimes.

Among all racial/ethnic groups, diversion programs appear to offer a valuable method for dealing with first-time offenders. A national survey found that funding was the primary concern of those spearheading juvenile diversion programs. Washington State's 1997 Community Juvenile Accountability Act (CJAA) ties funding for local juvenile justice programs to proof of their cost-effectiveness. Although far too few potentially effective juvenile justice programs have been rigorously evaluated, CJAA provides funding for evaluation through the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

CHART 5

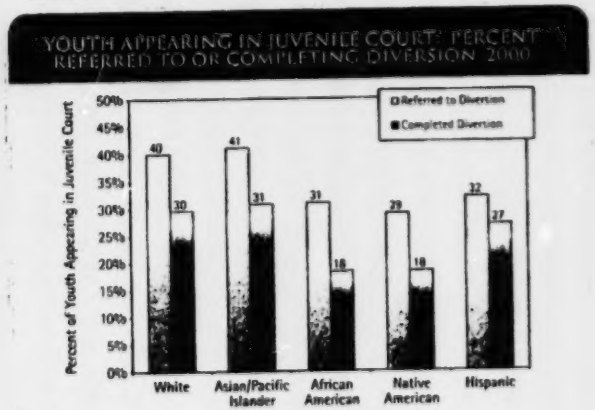
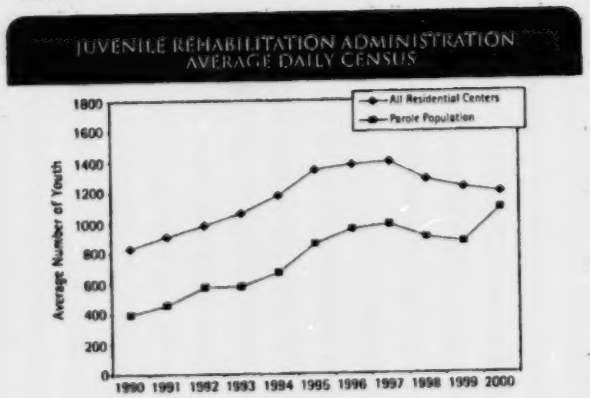


CHART 6



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SOURCES/ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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Washington Association of Local WIC Agencies, www.walwica.org
Washington State Employment Security Department
King County, Executive Office
US Department of Labor
National Center for Children in Poverty

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Gershoff, E.T & Aber, J.L. (2001). *Child Poverty in the U.S.: An Evidence-Based Conceptual Framework for Programs and Policies.*

FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Key Indicator and Text Sources
Washington State Department of Health (DOH), Center for Health Statistics
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Children's Administration
US Census Bureau
Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), Washington State Population Survey
The Children's Alliance

Chart Data Sources
Chart 1 - US Census Bureau, Census 2000
Chart 2 - US Census Bureau, Census 1990 and Census 2000
Chart 3 - Washington State Population Survey, 2000
Chart 4 - US Census Bureau, Census 1990 and Census 2000
Chart 5 - Washington State Population Survey, 2000
Chart 6 - US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey

Notes
The Washington State Population Survey (WSPS), conducted for the Washington OFM, is a random digit telephone survey of over 14,000 households patterned on the SIPP conducted nationally by the US Census Bureau.

The percent of children who are living in group-quarters or are heads-of-households are not presented in Chart 4.
The racial/ethnic categories omitted from the charts are multi-racial and some other race. The multi-racial category includes anyone who indicated more than one racial/ethnic group.

ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Key Indicator and Text Sources
Washington State OFM, WSPS
U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
Washington State DSHS, Children's Administration
Washington State DSHS, Office of Research and Data Analysis
US Census Bureau
Oregon Center for Public Policy
Washington State Community, Trade and Economic Development
Washington State DOH, Center for Health Statistics

Chart Data Sources
Chart 1 - US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey
Chart 2 - US Census Bureau, Census 2000 Supplementary Survey
Chart 3 - Washington State Employment Security Department
Chart 4 - Washington State DSHS (Food Stamps & TANF), Washington State Community (Food Bank)
Chart 5 - Washington State Population Survey, 2000
Chart 6 - US Census Bureau, Census 2000

Notes
For Chart 6, the Hispanic origin category is not mutually exclusive from other racial/ethnic categories.
The food bank information represents unduplicated visits.
The racial/ethnic categories omitted from the charts are multi-racial and some other race.

EDUCATION

Key Indicator and Text Sources

Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Washington State OFM, WSPS 2000
Human Services Policy Center (HSPC), University of Washington (UW), unpublished data from the Washington State Telephone Survey of Informal Child Care
Exploring Disparities in Educational Achievement: The Impact of School Funding. *State of Washington's Children, Fall 2001*

Chart Data Sources

Chart 1 - HSPC, UW, WA State Telephone Survey of Informal Child Care
Chart 2 - HSPC, UW, WA State Telephone Survey of Informal Child Care
Chart 3 - Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Chart 4 - Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Chart 5 - Washington State Population Survey, 2000
Chart 6 - Washington State Population Survey, 2000

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National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). From Neurons to Neighborhoods. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
Brandon, R.N., Maher, E.J., Joesch, J.M., and Doyle, S. (2002). Understanding Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care. Seattle, WA: HSPC, Evans School of Public Affairs, UW.

Notes

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is a standardized test administered by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to 4th, 7th, and 10th grade students from late April to early May. All students enrolled in special education programs and students with 504 plans that affected one or more of their test scores were excluded from the data analysis. Additionally, students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs were excluded. Finally, students lacking a scale score were also excluded. The gap analysis involved calculating the difference between the median score for select minority students and white students, dividing this difference by the white student median score, and converting this value into a percent.
The care arrangements for Family Child Care and Family, Friend, and Neighbor care are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

For Chart 4, the Hispanic origin category is not mutually exclusive from the other racial/ethnic categories. The racial/ethnic categories omitted from the charts are multi-racial and some other race.

For Chart 2, below minimum adequate income is defined as between one and two times the federal poverty level, at minimum adequate income is defined as between two and three times the federal poverty level, and above minimum adequate income is defined as between three and five times above the federal poverty level.

HEALTH

Key Indicator and Text Sources

Washington State DOH, Center for Health Statistics
Washington State DOH, Immunization Branch
Seattle Public Schools 1999 Teen Health Survey Results - Final Report
Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance 2000
Healthy People 2010. (2002). Available at www.health.gov/healthypeople
US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 1999 Physicians Survey

Chart Data Sources

Figure 1 - National Center for Disease Control (CDC) - see: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/maps/slide/003.htm
Chart 1 - CDC/NCHS, NHES, & NHANES, www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/hestats/overweight99.htm
Charts 2-6 - Seattle Public Schools 1999 Teen Health Survey

Notes

The Seattle Public Schools 1999 Teen Health Survey is Seattle's version of the national Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
NHANES is the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics.
Full immunization defined as 4+ DPT, 3+ Polio, 1+ Measles, 3+ Hib, 3+ Hep B.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Key Indicator and Text Sources

Washington State DOH, Center for Health Statistics
Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee 2001 Juvenile Justice Report
US Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Washington State Institute for Public Policy

Chart Data Sources

Charts 1-6 - Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee 2001 Juvenile Justice Report

WASHINGTON KIDS COUNT

This report is part of the Washington Kids Count project, which monitors the conditions of children and families in Washington, educates the public and policymakers about those conditions, and urges public action towards improved outcomes.

Washington Kids Count Advisory Board

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